

The DX Bulletin

America's Premier Weekly Amateur Radio Publication

SPECIAL REPORT

[In these days of multi-operator, expensive DXpeditions on chartered ships, one tends to forget about the original spirit of DXpeditioning: one individual hopping from island to island by whatever means of transportation available, making best use of what can be found at the site for antenna supports, enlisting new-found friends to help set up the station, and coming face-to-face with suspicious authorities who have no idea what you are doing. This spirit is still alive, as world-traveller Bernhard Stefan DL2GAC demonstrates with this tale. -ed.]

IOTA DXpedition of DL2GAC/DU
February to April 1988
by Bernhard Stefan

For the past 15 years I have two hobbies. One is spending longer holidays in far away countries, the other amateur radio. I try to combine these hobbies. My wish to visit remote places far away is quite fitting with activating remote IOTA islands.

One of my favorite countries is Philippines. I got a temporary licence there for the first time in 1983. After four visits lasting a total of seven months, I have seen most of the main islands.

When I got hold of the Islands On The Air (IOTA) island directory, I found five remote Philippine islands listed that had never seen accredited IOTA operations. I hadn't visited them before, so I decided to go again to Philippines and to try to activate them for the first time as New Ones for IOTA.

As station equipment I took a Yaesu FT 757 GX II, a FP 757 power supply and a groundplane antenna for 10, 15, and 20 meters.

After arrival in Manila, I renewed my licence and visited my friends Herman N0JN/DU7 in Cebu and Tan DU8CFT in Basilan Island. Via packet radio, Herman distributed a message with my intended IOTA island hopping schedule throughout the Philippines and the Far East. I sent copies of the packet message to The DX Bulletin, DX-MB in Germany, and Hans DF5UG, who passed the information on to the IOTA manager.

First Stop - Sulu Islands

Meanwhile, OM Tan introduced me to a friend who had an uncle in Jolo, the capital of Sulu Islands in the southwest corner of the Philippines: my first stop. The uncle became my host and send me first to the local police commander, because the Sulu Islands

is a sensitive area, which has seen in the past a lot of fighting between Muslims (MORO liberation front) and government troops. At present there is some kind of undeclared cease-fire and the police commander gave his approval.

To operate I had to buy a car battery, because the Jolo electrical supply is not reliable. Unfortunately the propagation was not good, and the announcements of my operation did not arrive in Europe and America until after I had finished my operation. I couldn't get the attention of the IOTA people over the air, because I didn't know a IOTA enthusiast, nor their frequencies and times. In four days operation at end of February I managed only about 70 contacts.

Next Stop - Calamian Group

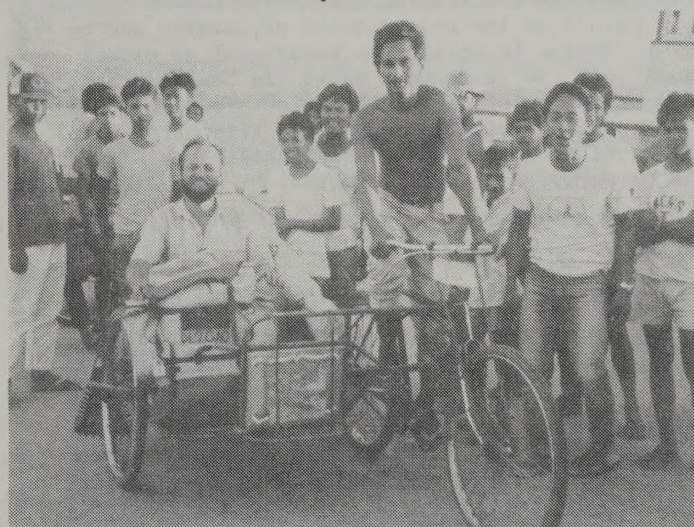
To get to the next stop, the Calamian group, I went by ship from southern Philippines to Manila and flew from there to Busuanga Island on the west coast of the main island group. To save on excess luggage on the 9-seater plane, I left the car battery behind.

This was a mistake. As it turned out, there was electricity only 4 hours per day in the evening, and it added considerably to the noise level. The first battery that I could rent locally was quite old and was drained after only 10-15 QSOs. After two days I talked a local businessman into renting me a better battery.

By this time my first island was more than three weeks in the past, and my intentions had been printed in DX newsletters around the world. The IOTA enthusiasts had heard about me and were looking for me. I overheard a QSO from F9RM with DU7RLC, in which F9RM asked about a German station with call DL2GAC going around some Philippine islands. I gave John a call and he alerted other IOTA enthusiasts by phone. From then on the rest was no problem: I could announce my plans over the air. I made about 130 contacts in 5 days of operation for the Calamians.

Polillo Island, and the Police

For the day trip to the next stop, I took a 6-hour bus ride from Manila and a 3-hour boat trip to Polillo Island. On the boat I met a policeman who advised me to see the mayor of Polillo first.



Caption: DU1/DL2GAC arrives on Polillo Island in the Philippines and loads his gear for transport to town.

The first night I spent in a hotel in Polillo town. Then the next morning I went on foot out of town along the seashore looking for a suitable location. After two hours I found an empty hut I could rent. On the backside of the hut was the beach with a clear view over the sea between west and north. On the front side was the road, which was good for transporting my battery to town for daily recharging. The leaf-roof

of the hut was leaking, but luckily it didn't rain. There was no furniture, no water, and no toilet, but the HF location was excellent. I slept on the hard floor and rented the kitchen table of a neighbor to put up my station.

For an antenna mast I acquired, like on all other islands, an 8-10 meter long bamboo pole, mounted my groundplane with the help of the neighbors in my backyard right at the seashore and went on the air.

The next day two plain-clothes policemen showed up and demanded an end to my operation, unless I could present a written permission of the mayor of Polillo. I told them, I don't have such a paper, but yesterday before I installed my radio, I visited the mayor, which turned out to be a lady. I introduced myself and my intentions, presented my papers and left behind photocopies of them. She asked me to sign the visitors book and didn't object to my radio activity, which I consider a permission to go ahead. The policemen left with copies of my licence papers for their superior.

Next evening shortly before nightfall I went for a swim in the sea. It was low tide and I had to go out about 200 meters. On the way back from the water I discovered a crowd of people around my antenna and hut. On approaching nearer in my bathing clothes, I saw two uniformed men with guns in my backyard. A third man explained that they were sent from the military commander of Polillo Islands to check my papers. Meanwhile the crowd of curious neighbors and other village people kept building up on all sides of my fenced backyard. They took notices of my equipment and left after a demonstration QSO with photocopies of my license papers.

My stay included the weekend of the WPX contest, which helped me especially with contacts to North and South America. My neighbors served me well with food and in 5 days I managed 280 QSOs.

Calayan Island

For the last two islands I had to go to northern Philippines. The only available transportation to the Babuyan Islands are some bigger outrigger motor boats, when the sea is not too rough. On the day of my arrival at the jump-off point for Babuyan Islands, two boats had arrived from Calayan Island. One boat owner told me, "I am the police chief of Calayan and on the way to Manila to attend the wedding of my eldest daughter." He introduced me to his boat captain, and told me there is an empty house on his property in Calayan town available for rent. After arrival, I paid a visit to the mayor and installed my station at the property of the police chief.

Over night the wind increased, it started to rain and the ship back to the mainland was cancelled. My bamboo pole antenna looked a bit like the Tower of Pisa and I had to take care that the wind didn't extinguish the flame of my candle during the night operations. The biggest problem was the recharging my car battery. I had difficulties explaining to my host that one hour of charging daily is not enough, so my operation was hampered by power shortage. During a number of contacts I could still receive well, but as soon I spoke into the microphone the frequency display went off, a sure sign of low battery voltage. On the other hand, because of cancelled ship, I was stuck for a week on Calayan Island, and thus had more operating days than on the previous islands and managed about 270 contacts.

The 6-hour return boat ride to the mainland was rough and crowded. Together with 30 passengers and crew members went 5 bulls, about 15 pigs, quite a number of chicken, dogs, and goats on the deck of the boat to the mainland. I was lucky to get a ride on the roof of the last bus to Laoag that day after disembarking.

Batanes, and the Police Again

Next morning I was early at the airport. I didn't have a reservation or a ticket, but got on the flight to Basco, Batanes, at the northern tip of the Philippines. I had to empty my car battery of acid to get it as part of my 50-kg luggage on board.

On the flight I met the mayor of Basco, introduced myself and told about my intention to operate an amateur radio station from Batanes. He advised me to see the governor of Batanes. After arrival I went to the office of the governor, but talked to his secretary, as the governor was in a longer meeting. I presented my papers, told about my intentions and left behind photocopies of my papers. I was asked to enter my name in the guestbook.

At the same place I met a lady who introduced me to a relative, who is renting a room to visitors at his residence at the town of Mahatao, 6 km away from Basco. I refilled and charged my battery, went to the police and asked to see the officer in charge. He was out, so I presented my papers, told about my intentions and left photocopies and a photo of myself at my home station in Germany behind. I also made an entry in the visitors book and left the name of my host and the address. Next morning I installed my station and during the weekend I made about 185 contacts.

On Monday I went to Basco to charge my battery. While it was charging, I went around town. A policeman approached me, asked me if I am Bernhard Stefan. When I said yes, he invited me to the police station to answer some questions. The police had the papers I had left behind in a file. After some time I was referred to the police commander. He read my file, asked me about my intentions and finally said: "I am not going to allow you to install your station."

I was perplexed and asked why. His answer was, "Your license is signed by the person in charge of the National Capital Region and not by the commissioner of the National Telecommunication Commission. It is therefore not valid in Region II, to which Batanes belongs." I objected, but he didn't listen to my arguments. I therefore asked him to give his refusal in writing, which he denied. I asked for his name, which he refused to give. I said I would ask outside for his name and left his office.

I decided not to follow the matter further, because I intended to leave the next day anyway for Manila, and this ignorant policeman couldn't change the fact that I had already made about 185 contacts.

After return to my QTH, I told my host and we discussed the matter. When he discovered that on my



Caption: High winds on Calayan Island add some horizontal polarization to the 3-band vertical of DU/DL2GAC, at the home of the island police chief.

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license above the signature of the signing person is
written: "By authority of the commissioner," he agreed
with me that my papers are in order. After lunch I
went for a sleep. When I woke up my host told me,
that during my sleep, three persons, the mayor of
Mahatao and two policemen, came and wanted to see my
papers. Because he knew where my papers were stored,
he didn't wake me up, showed himself my papers and
told them that he considered my papers in order. He
asked the visitors to tell the police commander my
papers were in order. Further, if the commander wanted
to follow the matter, he should come up with a written
paper. I would take the paper to the National
Telecommunication Commission in Manila, who would it
probably refer to the police commander there. It was
therefore not unlikely that the police commander of
Basco would hear from Manila.

Nothing happened afterwards, I flew the next
morning to Manila. Via the PARA (Philippine Amateur
Radio Association) office I got in touch with the
liaison officer for the contact to the licencing
authorities, Rafael C Azada DU1RFA, and told him the
story. On his request I gave him a written report
about the matter for further action. He confirmed,
that my papers were in order.

The last stop, Langkawi Island in Malaysia, was
less eventful. I had already received a license for
Malaysia in January, as 9M2QR/p. Langkawi is a
holiday island with several beach resorts and easily
accessible, because there are daily flights from Kuala
Lumpur via Penang Island. There is a reliable public
electricity supply. In 6 days of operation I made
about 500 contacts, more than half of them on 28 MHz.

[Thanks to Stefan, Langkawi Is. is now AS-58,
Calamian group is OC-90, Polillo Islands are OC-91,
Babuyan Islands are OC-92, and Batanes Islands are OC-
93. That's five New Ones on a single trip! No IOTA
reference number for Sulu Islands, as the IOTA manager
did not receive advance notice.]

THE DX BULLETIN

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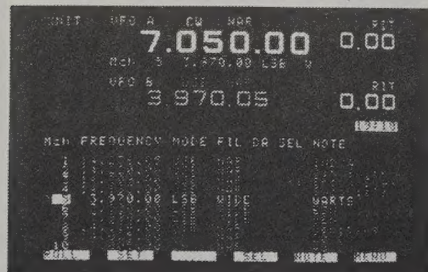
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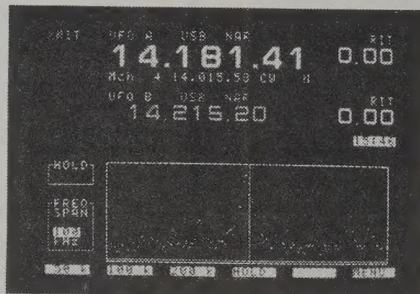
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